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# Farewell to all that? The uncertain future of youth and community work education

**Tony Jeffs and Jean Spence**

*This article considers issues in the field of professional community and youth work education. It does so with particular reference to the development of a range of different programmes since the start of the professional endorsement process following the Thompson Report. The analysis is undertaken with regard to transformations in HE since the late 1980s which, it is argued, have been driven by commercial concerns to the detriment of the educational principles and practices which are relevant to all HE programmes, but particularly important to a profession which claims to be educational in its purposes. The analysis of the institutional and policy context within which qualifying courses currently operate suggests that as presently conceived, they are facing an uncertain and insecure future.*

**Keywords:** professional education; youth work; higher education; policy.

There are five distinct routes to securing a Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) recognised professional qualification in youth and community work.<sup>1</sup> All have standing as Higher Educational programmes, but not all are run within HE establishments. Via such courses, 1094 people became qualified youth and community workers in 2006. During the academic year 2004-2005, there were 1,466 enrolments compared to 1133 the previous year (National Youth Agency, 2006). This compares with the 390 who completed a professional training course in 1984. Qualified teachers were in 1984 still entitled to claim full-status as qualified youth workers and during that year approximately 200 did so. Therefore the number of new workers registered in 1984 was just under 600 (Kuper, 1985).

The routes to qualifications are:

- Diploma in Higher Education (Dip.HE) – requiring two years' full-time study or the equivalent undertaken on a part-time basis;
- Foundation Degree – a two year full time employment led programme developed by educational institutions in collaboration with local employers;
- BA (or BSc) with Honours – involving a minimum of three years' full-time study or part-time equivalent;
- Post Graduate Certificate or Post Graduate Diploma – secured after one year of full time study or part-time equivalent;
- MA (or MSc) – usually involving one calendar year of full time study or part-time equivalent.

Between 2008 and 2010 the number of students gaining a Dip.HE qualification will plummet. Currently these are given either to those exiting an honours degree programme

at the end of the second year or as a discrete qualification. The decline will occur partly due to existing diploma programmes being re-configured as Foundation Degrees but also because to secure full professional status all students commencing their studies in 2010 will be required to complete an honours degree. Subsequently those leaving after two years successful full time undergraduate study will obtain an academic qualification equivalent to NVQ level 4. After 2013 this will enable them to secure employment as semi-professional Youth Support Workers. 'Top-up' programmes of, or equivalent to, one year's full time study will provide an opportunity to upgrade to honours degrees for those with Dip.HEs and foundation degrees.

All courses leading to qualification are approved and validated in England by the Education and Training Sub-Committee of the National Youth Agency (ETS) and its equivalents elsewhere in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Variable validating criteria are imposed by each of the national bodies but the equivalence is sufficient for employers and educational institutions in the different nations to treat the courses as comparable. This reflects the porous nature of the labour market with significant movement of staff across borders, and the fact that prior to the creation of the discrete national bodies, ETS validated programmes in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, whilst distance learning programmes have continued throughout to operate in all localities. The following discussion focuses primarily upon the situation in England where the majority of the courses are concentrated. There are variations of emphasis in other countries depending upon local policy, but the English situation highlights a number of key issues relevant to the quality of education in community and youth work.

## **Thompson does his bit**

The current validation structure is recent in origin. No effective validating agency existed anywhere in the UK prior to 1983, although a de facto system operated whereby such programmes were 'inspected' by HMIs in order to secure for their graduates professional status under JNC. Any of the eleven diploma courses or the two post-graduate programmes then operating might have been judged unsatisfactory by the HMIs, who could exert pressure for them either to improve or close, but this never occurred in practice. After 1961, the JNC had a statutory responsibility for granting recognition to a qualification. It might unilaterally have identified a programme as failing, denying qualified status to its graduates. However, JNC lacked the staffing to monitor courses and consequently its capacity for independent action was severely limited. In practice, it required the submission of documentation for new programmes but the process was somewhat perfunctory.

The *Report of the Review Group on the Youth Service in England* (The Thompson Report), (HMSO, 1982), was critical of the existing training programmes and not content to leave intact the prevailing informal mechanisms for assessing their adequacy. Predictably, Thompson reiterated the perennial complaint of employers that course content bore little relation to the tasks expected of new workers, and expressed dismay at the absence of agreement about appropriate course content amongst those teaching on them, and between employers and trainers regarding relevant curriculum and syllabus. Additionally, the report suggested that the focus of some programmes mistakenly prioritise the needs of

students, as 'second chance' learners, at the expense of ensuring that those individuals were fully prepared for entry into a demanding profession.

In order to address these matters, Thompson advocated setting up a national body, to 'monitor and supervise' the initial training of youth and community workers (HMSO, 1982: 96), akin to the Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers which had been established in 1962.<sup>2</sup> It was envisaged that this body would be responsible for maintaining professional standards by:

- assessing and endorsing courses against published guidelines and criteria which it would be responsible for producing;
- undertaking continuous surveillance and regular reviews of courses;
- regulating standards of entry to courses;
- investigating the need for new curriculum content for courses;
- monitoring the distribution and volume of training facilities in relation to employment needs.

Thompson was pushing at an open door. The authors, not least the Chair who had been a long-serving HMI, must have been aware that the Secretary of State was already convinced of the need for such a body. Within weeks of the Report surfacing, the responsible minister announced that a Council for Education and Training in Youth and Community Work (CETYSW) would be established. Within a year CETYSW was up and running with a budget of £120,000 and a staff of eight. It had three areas of responsibility: the development of part-time and volunteer training; the monitoring and development of in-service training; and, on behalf of the JNC, the monitoring and validation of initial training courses that awarded nationally recognised professional qualifications. To undertake the last task, an Initial Training and Education Panel (ITEP) was formed. ITEP comprised representatives drawn from leading youth work employers, trade unions and training agencies, with employers in a majority. Henceforth new and existing courses were to be 'validated' by panels comprising employers, ITEP appointees and staff from the other training agencies. Panels were advised and supported in undertaking this task by a CETYSW officer. To make this possible and the process even-handed, criteria were produced against which courses were to be calibrated. Inevitably the range and complexity of these criteria have expanded over time, but fundamentally they relate to syllabus, resource allocation, modes of assessment, the balance between fieldwork and taught units, methods of recruitment and adequacy of documentation.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the Conservative government sought in various ways to 'roll back the state'. One strategy involved establishing review groups charged with trimming the number of existing QUANGOs. One of these, the Norton Review in 1991 recommended merging CETYSW with the bigger National Youth Bureau to create a new organisation, the National Youth Agency (Davies, 1999; Wylie, 2007). After a fairly painless amalgamation the NYA undertook the tasks previously allocated to the CETYSW, via an allocated staff team reporting to the Education and Training Standards Committee of the NYA (ETS).<sup>3</sup>



## The HE Context

The Thompson Report made its proposals concerning the training of full-time youth and community workers with reference to prevailing conditions in Higher Education (HE) unaware that these were to be swept aside within a decade. The Thatcher government had vigorously pursued policies of marketisation and privatisation throughout the 1980s with regard to public utilities and some welfare sectors such as housing, but did not seriously apply these policies to education until after the 1987 election. Even then the reform agenda, encompassed in the 1988 Education Act, focused initially on schools. This changed with the passing in 1992 of the Further and Higher Education Act, as a consequence of which Local Education Authorities lost control of further education (FE), and the last vestiges of their influence over the polytechnics. The Act technically abolished the binary divide between pre-existing universities<sup>4</sup> and the polytechnics which became 'new' universities. The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) which since 1964 had been tasked with ensuring that all qualifications taught in 'non-incorporated colleges' and polytechnics were of comparable standard to those offered by the established universities, became defunct as the new universities gained the freedom to bestow their own qualifications in any subject they chose. However, such freedoms were never absolute. For programmes embodying a professional qualification, such as youth and community work, the curriculum and resources allocated had to comply with yardsticks set by the appropriate professional endorsing body, in this case the newly established ETS.

Endorsing bodies are usually established by law, and therefore ultimately answerable to the government. However, membership is dominated by potential employers who thereby exert major control over the content, direction and format of professional education. This 'loose coupling' structure between state and employer applies to youth and community work, child care and social work areas involving employers from the voluntary, statutory and private sectors. Where the state is a monopoly employer, although it may sub-contract elements of the service to private and voluntary agencies, such as Youth Justice, Connexions and Probation, a different model operates. Here the employer, in this case a government agency, imposes content and structure, but introduces the market by inviting universities to tender for the right to 'deliver' the pre-packaged programme for a fixed term. In such circumstances, the university becomes a direct client of the government required contractually to implement programmes as directed.

The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act resulted in a period of intense restructuring within the sector. A profusion of administrative and financial directives involving legislation, government circulars, reports, policy guidelines and alterations in the ways state funding is allocated guided this restructuring. The accumulated impact has been to reconfigure the balance between management, administration, teaching and research. Marketisation has injected competition into each and every corner of the sector, strengthening the autonomy of management, bureaucratising systems and subjecting academic issues to pressures external to issues of educational worth and intellectual validity. Increased commercialisation has been accompanied by an increase in student numbers and a skewing of provision towards courses which are deemed most profitable, modularisation of programmes, and a restructuring of finance to shift the burden of cost towards students. It is in this climate that community and youth work education and training has developed in the post-Thompson

period and only by appreciating the impact and meaning of these changes is it possible to assess the current issues for facing contemporary training.

### **Commercialisation**

The business ethos and orientation of the university sector has a long history, but the commercial imperative is now becoming central. Competition between institutions is encouraging more universities to shift from charitable to company status in order to gain greater freedom to hire and fire staff, expand profit generating activities and avoid meeting the 'public benefit test' introduced under the 2006 Charities Act which requires charities to demonstrate how people on low incomes benefit from their activities. Cumbria University and Trinity and All Saints College are registered as companies and according to one law firm six institutions have 'recently' approached them for advice on how to become companies (Newman, 2007).

Increasing commercialisation is seldom beneficial to the maintenance of educational standards (Bok, 2003). Freedom to operate in market conditions is leading to 'tumbledown' with universities selling courses and themselves using straplines as dishonest as any employed by car or soap powder manufacturers. For example, the Open University has been running a TV advertisement promising, 'All the support you need to be the person you want to be,' whilst Northumbria University pledges, 'Great Learning. Great Experiences. Great Future.' Though there might be little sympathy for those over the age of 18 gullible enough to believe such nonsense, it remains disturbing that institutions unscrupulously sell themselves and their courses in this way. In the United States the temptation to recruit at any cost and without heed to a potential student's suitability to undertake or to complete the programme, has led to one university being fined \$9.8 million for 'mis-selling' (Phillips, 2004). Viewed from this distance the fine appears extraordinary but in reality it barely dents the annual profits of the university concerned. The commercial pressure to fill places is intense, especially for universities and colleges which are primarily dependent upon teaching income.

Lee (2006) reports staff in some unnamed British universities being told to take anyone off the street to meet the quotas. On average, over 20 per cent of students now fail to complete their degree course while at London Metropolitan University only 52.2 per cent stay to the end (Pollard, 2006). There are many reasons for non-completion, including financial ones (Quinn et al, 2005) but such figures imply that many who are ill-prepared and un-qualified to study at degree level are being encouraged to do so, wasting their money and, more importantly, precious resources that could more usefully be spent meeting the educational needs of others.

Evidence is emerging about managerial pressure applied to academic staff to recruit, prevent wastage and to meet targets regardless of educational standards. One survey found 84 per cent of lecturers believed they had recently been obliged to lower standards; 71 per cent had admitted students unfit to study at the required level; 48 per cent reported that they had 'felt obliged to pass students who did not merit a pass;' 42 per cent had had fail decisions overturned by managers; and for 46 per cent in their area of expertise 'important areas of the curriculum have been cut because they are too expensive to teach' (Baty, 2004a; Baty, 2007).

### **Student Numbers**

Universities driven by financial imperatives depend upon maximising student numbers. In 1963 around 66,000 (approximately four per cent) of 18 year olds, equivalent to a third of grammar school entrants, went annually to university. The authors of the influential Robbins Report in 1963 anticipated a level of growth that would raise the proportion to 15 per cent by 2000 (HMSO, 1963: 71). They warned that this figure might be ambitious as research suggested no more than eight per cent of the population were likely to achieve the educational standards required to make a successful application to a university. In fact, by 2000, almost 40 per cent of 18 year olds entered HE and the government hope to drive this up to 50 per cent by 2010.

It is evident that expansion has been facilitated by demand. Growth propagates growth as parents who are graduates encourage their progeny to follow in their footsteps. More widely, young people and their parents are led to believe that securing a degree leads to higher lifetime earnings. This is only partially correct. Benefits of HE qualifications vary according to subject, place of study and unsurprisingly the class origins and gender of the graduate (Harkness and Machin, 1999; Blundell et al, 2000). Predictably the lower the parental income and more disadvantaged the family background of graduates, the less likely they are to secure a 'graduate' job or they take longer to do so (Furlong and Cartmel, 2005). Unprecedented levels of youth unemployment since 1970 might have further stimulated demand, as a 'push' incentive. Studying is a positive alternative to surviving on 'benefits.' Many undoubtedly benefit from the additional time in education, but in this category there are some who are simply 'entertained,' 'mopped-up' and 'occupied' taking courses that hardly improve their chances of securing a foothold in the labour market or lifting life-time earnings (Winch and Hyland, 2007; DfES, 2003). The promise of post graduate earning is even more volatile for mature students for whom the financial gains from degree-level qualifications vary steeply according to the subject and place of study while gains from NVQ 3 and lower qualifications are non-existent (Wolf, Jenkins and Vignoles, 2006).

Conditions in the labour market have further contributed to increased student numbers. Excess of labour supply over demand enables employers to increasingly opt out of the costs of training the next generation of workers. Between 1985 and 2004 the proportion of young people on employer funded training declined by 50 per cent to a derisory three per cent of 16 year olds (DfES, 2004). Related to this transfer of responsibility and cost, access to ever more crafts, semi-professions and professions, becomes dependent upon successfully completing a graduate or post-graduate programme, regardless of the actual requirements of the job and creating a tension between academic standards and the skills demands of employers.

Thus the priorities of educational institutions have shifted, making 'intellectual culture into a short-term obstacle for students to pass through on their way to credentials' (Collins, 1979: 198; see also Ainley, 1999). Rather than seeking education, students increasingly strive for high grades in school and university in order to secure entry onto professional qualifying programmes. 'Academic' subject based degrees have been sacrificed for vocational variants and this has been welcomed and encouraged by successive education ministers. For example, in 2003 Charles Clarke described medieval historians as ornaments and their departments as undeserving of state funding. Three years later Bill Rammell welcomed the



sharp decline in the number of students studying 'non-vocational' programmes in favour of the increase in those choosing vocational degrees (Clare, 2006). Expansion of this particular hue has been consistently driven by a belief amongst politicians of all parties that it is essential for the economic well-being of the nation. Influenced by 'human capital theory' they hold that investment in education produces tangible economic returns (Becker, 1964). As one Minister of Education typically explained, 'World class higher education ensures that countries can grow ...It is therefore at the heart of the productive capacity of the new economy' (Blunkett, 2000). Yet despite the enormous growth that has taken place since the late-1950s, Britain remains only fractionally above the OECD average participation rate of 38 per cent and way below Australia's 60 per cent (OECD, 2007), perhaps because other nations share the same perspective.

Expansion of student numbers has not been matched by a corresponding rise in funding. In 1989 expenditure per student was just over £7,500, projected to be just over £5,000 by 2006 (MacLeod, 2004). Between 1989 and 1992 HE student numbers spiralled from 250,000 to 382,000 but during the same period unit costs per student actually fell by 25 per cent (Mizen, 2004). Confirming the prediction made in 1960 by Kingsley Amis that 'more will mean worse,' growth has invariably been sustained by applying economies of scale. Virtually every institution has concentrated on maximising student numbers and minimising costs by raising staff-student ratios, reducing expenditure per student on libraries and equipment, and reducing staff – student contact time. Where courses and programmes have been unable to recruit at levels deemed cost-effective, they have been considered a drain on institutional resources and without reference to any other criteria have been systematically closed.

Laboratory based science courses have suffered the most from closure, but so too have programmes such as education and counselling which require above average tutorial time and practice supervision. In an effort to compensate for the failure of the HE market in some crucial areas of employment, it has been necessary for central government to find alternative options. For school-teaching, and to a lesser extent social work and probation, the 'solution' has been an expansion of 'apprenticeship' routes into these 'semi'- professions. Trainees (they are specifically not called students) on such programmes are work-based, with their learning managed by the employing agency. They are inducted from the start into the ethos of the institution, schooled for compliance and obliged to fit into the agency's pre-ordained norms. Success or failure for trainees becomes tied to the capacity to 'fit' with the needs of the employer as much as to their intellectual ability. Emphasis is placed on learning the skills of 'delivery' and client management rather than subject knowledge or theory. Those trained in this way are not required to acquire a knowledge base adequate to equip them to effectively challenge the supremacy of their managers. For example, trainee probation officers are not taught sufficient criminology, trainee teachers enough educational theory nor social workers the sociology and social policy to enable them to critique the pre-suppositions shaping policy or to question the autocratic leadership that hands down policy.

However, it is not only within such directly employer-led conditions of learning that the critical capacity of education is diminishing. Rising numbers of students who are instrumental in their use of HE and the growing influence of employers and funders in the decision-making process has had significant consequences for approaches to teaching



and learning in general. The response of the majority of university managers to changed conditions has been to intensify and condense the conditions of learning under the rubric of increased flexibility, by modularising programmes within a university calendar based on the semester system.

### **Modularisation**

Modularisation, like the division of labour in industry, increases specialisation and productivity. But it is paradoxical in its effects. Mobilised as a means of accommodating increasing student numbers, it has then been invariably linked to a requirement of higher minimum numbers for units to run. Presenting apparent opportunities for greater choice, many students find their first choice modules culled due to low enrolment numbers. The openness of the modular system is supposed to improve inter-disciplinary contact. Yet no substantive evidence exists as to whether the intellectual and professional horizons of students are extended by being taught with peers drawn from other routes and courses, nor if cross-pollination compensates for the inevitable erosion of disciplinary or professional identity. Modularisation appears to give students opportunity to specialise and follow individual interests but this is contradicted by the way in which it promotes student 'drift', encouraging the take-up of modules which students perceive as 'easy' such as those without examinations, or with minimal theoretical content, or taught by lecturers known to spoon feed students, demand little or no reading and who mark generously – word quickly spreads regarding such matters (Ainley, 1994).

One of the main effects of modularisation is to break down the boundaries of disciplines and to make programmes permeable or semi-permeable. Overlapping and free-standing units facilitate 'shopping basket' or 'pick and mix' approaches to education. Superficially this seems to offer particular benefits for students and staff. By breaking up courses into discrete units, modularisation gifts flexibility allowing students to dictate the pace at which they study whilst obliterating the divisions between full-time and part-time study. Students can move seamlessly in and out of programmes or routes, personalising their learning trajectory. It also allows for uncomplicated transfer between institutions. Like camels students can carry credits gained in one university to another located anywhere in the country, or like squirrels bury their credits to dig them up years later. Credit transfer offers benefits to those students most likely to 'drop-out' of a given programme (Quinn et al, 2005). For staff the system offers the flexibility of adding or subtracting units in any given academic year making it easier to construct periods of study leave. For those who dislike teaching, or view it as unbecoming to their status, it helps them more easily 'buy in' low paid staff paid for from their 'research' or 'consultancy' earnings.

However breaking down disciplinary boundaries also fragments the student experience of education. Students bounce from module to module, sitting alongside others they scarcely know and rarely meet again. William Morris noted that the division of labour led to the 'division of men,' likewise modularisation divides and isolates students and staff. Students are routinely taught by staff encountered only for a given module, who never learn their names or form a meaningful relationship with either the group or individuals. Indeed, it has been argued that setting aside time to learn students' names is time wasted for lecturers which would be better devoted to research. (McCarron 2007). Academic staff have no incentive to invest time and energy in teaching. Harvard Medical School is so concerned

about the lack of enthusiasm amongst faculty towards teaching they have advanced an £8 million annual bonus to entice them to work with students (THES, 2007a). In Britain, some departments opt to employ teaching assistants, post-graduates and part-timers to undertake all first year undergraduate teaching. It is perhaps unsurprising that in many universities a high proportion of students don't so much leave as 'disappear,' dropping out unmissed and unnoticed by peers or lecturers, and that a growing number behave in the disruptive and self-indulgent ways associated with disaffected school pupils (Lee, 2006).

Identified often only by their numbers, students are increasingly denied the opportunity to engage in sustained conversation with either peers or teachers. They are denied sufficient space and time to mutually reflect upon course content and subsequently return to it to seek elucidation regarding niggling inconsistencies that arise when attempting to connect ideas. Any expectation that they will be able to learn from other students via discussion and social interaction in the classroom or outside of it is eradicated by anonymity. As universities become ever more like London terminals with students passing through on personal learning journeys, opportunities are lost to learn from and to teach each other; to engage in the conversations that provide the chance to test out ideas, and formulate theory in the midst of a community of scholars who mutually gain 'for themselves new ideas and views, fresh matter of thought, and distinct principles for judging and acting, day by day' (Newman, 1858: 146). In the world of mass education, opportunities for 'self-education', for exercising the arts of informal education and conversation that will serve students well in life as much as in their working environment are fewer and fewer.

Every policy implemented to raise through-put, to reduce the unit costs attached to each student eradicates more of the free time, open spaces and tranquillity that foster informal education and mutual learning. Production-line learning is achieved through the delivery of packages of information which can not stimulate the acquisition of a deeper understanding of the human condition. Examples of how this operates include the growing expectation or requirement that lecture notes and essential reading materials are put on the web to allow students unbridled access to 'course content' without the chore of attending lectures or visiting a library. Virtual universities, distance learning, the electronic student chat room, and much more besides, promise the ultimate economies of scale. Embraced as an exciting new world by many (Weber, 1999; Freeman et al: 2000), they allow for minimal cost instruction along the lines of America's largest higher education institution, the University of Phoenix, a for-profit company with 142 mini-campuses dotted around the country and 240,000 students online. Online and distance learning permits providers to control input and minimise disruption, whilst ensuring students do not infect each other with critical and distracting ideas, wasting time in idle chatter or browsing in a library when they might be digesting pre-packaged course materials. Here at last is the opportunity to create electronically a closed system of learning Bell and Lancaster only dreamt of two centuries ago.

Just as modularisation fragments the student experience so it fragments knowledge. The *modus operandi* requires subjects, ideas, concepts and disciplines to be dismantled, gutted and abridged then extruded into standardised semesterised units. Aims, objectives and outcomes written in formulaic ways allow students to predict what is required of them, and for the unit to be picked-up and discarded by any lecturer – then picked up again

and discarded by their successors. Specialist knowledge and subject expertise become of diminishing significance. Indeed the less the lecturer knows the lower the probability they will deviate from the script and fail to 'cover the material.' These new structures demand that what is 'delivered' in the allotted time must be tested and consumed in isolation. Within them, no lecturer can possibly know what a student brings with them by way of previous learning. The Connexions Diploma operated on this basis. Lecturers, (although they might more appropriately be termed 'delivery agents') were supplied with a collection of 'power-point' presentations to be dispensed in a set time to trainees who had pre-packaged reading but no assumed access to a library.<sup>5</sup> Presentation was followed by standardised exercises assessing 'the trainee's level of absorption and capacity to apply the techniques and information within their work setting.'<sup>6</sup>

Outcome driven processes curtail and in the case of pre-packaged programmes seek to remove the opportunities for teachers to give expression to what Palmer refers to as the 'capacity for connectedness,' to 'join self and subject' (1998: 11) thereby linking ideas and enabling student and teacher alike to move beyond the merely relevant 'what is', towards a liberatory sense of 'what might be.' Compartmentalised outcome-directed instruction runs counter to the very principles of good teaching. Learning aims and objectives, 'benchmarking'<sup>7</sup> and all the paraphernalia of modern education focus on measurable outcomes; on itemised 'endings', transferring competencies and on learning how to internalise and regurgitate the pre-packaged information. As Furedi explains, university teachers are 'no longer supposed to teach what they think needs to be taught, and they certainly do not have the right to lecture material for which the learning outcome cannot be demonstrated in advance' (2004: 76-77). These externally imposed structures, often willingly embraced by anti-intellectual elements within the university and those who expect courses to produce biddable employees, militate against one of the primary tasks of the committed university teacher which as Weber (1967) stressed, is to teach students to recognise 'inconvenient' facts, to question accepted opinion, to interrogate the obvious, to think independently and when necessary courageously. And of course, for many students, simply seeking the qualification which will gain them the right to access a higher paid job, there is little to be gained from critical or disruptive thinking. Their instrumental understanding of the purpose of HE is not only influenced by the demands of the labour market and the culture of educational institutions, but also by their own financial investment in their education which has been increasing exponentially in recent years.

### ***Transferring the burden***

Expansion has been achieved by a neat governmental sleight of hand entailing a gradual lowering of expenditure per head whilst shifting costs to individual students and their families. As student numbers have risen, so grants have been cut in real terms, eligibility for grants curtailed and fees introduced. Expenditure previously borne by institutions is transferred to students. For example many programmes no longer supply 'hardcopy' handbooks, reading lists or course outlines, replacing them with digital copies which students print for themselves.

Currently students from households earning less than £15,000 receive a full grant of £2,700, with the expectation that universities will top it up to £3,000 to cover tuition fees.



Despite this largesse Furlong and Cartmel (2005) found that it was those from poorest households whose families were ill-equipped to support them, who acquired the highest levels of debt. Debt and loans have a substantial negative impact on degree completion rates for low income students (Kim, 2006). Most students receive no grant. Barclays Bank calculates that those graduating in June 2008 will do so carrying an average debt of £33,708 (Hunter, 2005). The cost of completing a university degree is now estimated to be £39,000, outside of London – £9,000 fees plus living costs. This figure ignores lost earnings (Lightfoot, 2007).

Tuition fees, which are predicted to rise sharply for 'elite' universities after 2010, already encourage divergence between courses and institutions. Some universities and colleges have elected to charge lower fees (for example Leeds Metropolitan University charges only £2,000), whilst some prefer to offer more substantial bursaries. Cheapest of all are the foundation degrees delivered by further education colleges. This has distorted recruitment patterns as some programmes, especially those leading to public service professions which do not promise high salaries are abandoned in favour of more lucrative options such as law. Some students tend simply to opt for the cheapest and most accessible course of study appropriate to their field of interest rather than choosing on the basis of quality. This will widen an already-present fissure in undergraduate provision. Ultimately what will affect graduate status will be place of study and degree subject rather than degree classification (Wolf, 2002). As Margaret Hodge, when Minister responsible for Higher Education acknowledged to a House of Commons Committee in May 2003, if potential students 'thought and acted rationally' they would not waste their time and resources 'going to one of the new universities.'

As costs rise so it appears does a customer mentality amongst students: 'I pay therefore I pass.' The customer equivalence is obviously restricted. For the 'sale' of teaching is a limited factor in determining a student's success or failure. As Kiloh reminds us, ultimately 'learning is something you do for yourself' (1998: 47). Yet the 'customer – provider' perspective is re-shaping how universities relate to students and vice-a-versa. University marketing encourages the customer mentality by suggesting studying is an investment for a qualification which will lead to lucrative paid employment (Kipp, 2004: 2004a). In some institutions the term 'customer' has replaced 'student' (Hill, 1995). On the basis of her research, Lee (2006), concluded that the burgeoning consumer mentality has significantly altered the nature of the relationship between staff and students. According to a recent study on student behaviour carried out by the University and College Union (UCU, 2007) students increasingly view degrees as a 'traded commodity', blaming teachers if they fail to achieve expected results. Over a quarter of lecturers reported in a survey that they had been victims of physical, verbal and written threats from students. Conflict is exacerbated as students seeking qualifications for purely utilitarian ends come to resent anything or anyone standing in their way.

The quality of the education is thus separated from the 'outcome' and can become an irrelevance in the worst cases of student instrumentalism. Indeed it is economically irrational for the purchaser 'student' to spend more than the minimum required to achieve the license to practice, unless the pricey option offers tangible fiscal benefits. Eventually universities charging reduced fees, or providing higher bursaries may have to convince



enough potential students that their degree is worth more in the market place than cheaper versions, including Foundation Degrees, offered by the local FE college or distance learning programme or they too will be priced out of their host institution. In these matters markets take few prisoners and the long-time survival of some professional education in the wider university sector is by no means assured.

Accumulated student debt forces many to undertake part-time, or even full-time, work whilst studying which has led to a decline in volunteering and pro bono work whilst at college. Moreau and Leatherwood (2006) confirm that a long term impact of the increase in student debt has been a decline in the amount of voluntary work carried out by students from lower social class groupings. For example, whilst forty and fifty years ago it was not unknown for youth and community students to collectively run youth clubs, voluntarily initiate and organise community projects and run holiday play schemes, this is no longer on the agenda as students prioritise paid employment.

Debt further ultimately encourages graduates to seek the best paid, rather than the most suitable job. On the basis of longer experience of this system in the United States, Smith (2004) argues that debts and loans 'place a barrier between a dedicated young person and his or her admirable ambitions after graduation that has proved the most pernicious.' According to King and Frishberg (2001) debts prevent two thirds of American graduates opting for a public service career. Traditionally, compensation for the lower salaries and anti-social hours was found in the heightened social kudos attached to the 'service' and high levels of commitment and dedication in public service careers such as youth work, teaching and nursing. Such work also promised some professional autonomy. These compensations are now significantly diminished in response to Thatcherism's refusal to 'imagine individuals (or institutions) which exist independent of the cash nexus' (Evans, 2004: 138). The ethos of public service professions, where 'ideally, you realise yourself through service to others' (Magnet, 2003: 41) is at odds with a society energetically seeking to convince itself and the up-and-coming generation that self-fulfilment, personal success, wealth and the individual ego must take precedence.

Not surprisingly, unless motivated by a counter ideology such as a religious faith or political commitment, young people are more and more shunning programmes linked to public sector careers if they can. The end result is declining educational entry standards for such programmes. In teaching and social work, such a trend initially motivated the government to introduce monetary incentives, via lower fees, to attract 'high performing' students onto qualifying courses. The relative failure of this initiative was followed by a shift of focus towards attracting 'high flying' graduates into the public sector. Schemes devised to fast track elite graduates up the career ladder in the police and armed services, have been followed by 'Teaching First,' designed to attract to school-teaching those who might otherwise go immediately into high paid private sector employment. Now, in *Aiming High for Young People: A Ten Year Strategy for Positive Activities* (HM Treasury, 2007) the government has announced it will invest £25,000,000 in a similar scheme for community and youth work. Like the initiatives on which it is based it holds out the promise to participants that the career ladder will be tilted in their favour. In an unsubtle way it also suggests the current routes of entry are failing to draw in high quality workers and that only bribes, not a commitment to public service, will attract talented people into the field.

When the costs of acquiring a degree were low, the point of entry into the labour market was less critical for those from middle and low income households. Tuition fees and loss of grants radically altered this. Moreover, it is far easier to manufacture graduates than create graduate-level jobs. Consequently around 40 per cent of those graduating enter jobs that cannot be defined as 'graduate employment' and with 'lower skill levels than in previous years' (Wolf, 2002: 243). Creating an all-graduate youth and community profession paid for to a significant extent by the students themselves will not automatically alter the range of talents required to practise or do little to raise the standard of the service offered if there is little qualitative difference between contemporary graduates and their predecessors with 'lower level' qualifications.

## **Impact on Community and Youth Work Education**

Whatever its highest ideals and values, youth and community work education and training has inevitably, like other disciplines and professions, been forced to adapt, compromise and shift its approach in order to maintain its position within the HE sector. In the face of increased commercialisation, it might have been predicted that community and youth work programmes, which are expensive relative to other subjects, and whose pedagogical methods traditionally rely on relatively small numbers, would have suffered from closure or transfer from the academy to the field. Mainly this has not happened. Indeed, since the introduction of Foundation Degrees and the financial incentives attached to them, the number of courses has increased markedly.

There was an inkling that transfer to the field was a possibility when seventeen 'Apprenticeship Routes', funded by the Educational Support Grant, were established in England and Wales between 1989 and 1990 (see Kavanagh, Rittman and Smith, 1994), but this experiment was not repeated and efforts to replace HE programmes with NVQ qualifications have likewise had minimal success demanding as they are of time and effort from the field. The fragmented nature of the community and youth work field makes it simply unrealistic to develop adequate training in that context. Employers of youth and community workers have been as vocal as head teachers, social work managers and chief probation officers regarding the failings of new recruits emerging from universities 'their heads full of theory' and 'clueless about doing the job in the real world.' These managers are repeating the mantra that Colley (2003) describes as the 'longest whine in history,' but most youth and community agencies lack the financial clout or organisational elasticity to create their own ticket of entry.

The example of the YMCA is instructive in this respect. The American YMCA created its own in-house training route when it established its first college in 1885 to train General Secretaries, and the British YMCA tentatively followed suit in the 1930s. Post-war decline in the number of YMCAs meant that by the 1970s the British course could only survive by incrementally expanding recruitment to provide mainstream youth and community work training and eventually by linking itself to a Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) affiliated college. Similarly, Westhill College (Birmingham) eventually severed all but the most tenuous links with the Methodist Church prior to amalgamation with Birmingham University (Holmes, 2007). Connexions had, and the Youth Justice Board still has the purchasing power

to fund tailor-made training programmes with compliant universities, but for generic youth and community work, the numbers employed by any given local authority and voluntary organisation are mainly too small, and the financial state of such organisations too parlous, to warrant setting up 'in-house' routes to qualification.

Within the universities themselves, community and youth work staff have been adept at accommodating changed conditions, moving with policy, accessing 'one off' sources of funding such as that available for apprenticeship schemes and foundation degrees, delivering modules in the field to earn extra revenue, helping to meet widening participation targets with non-traditional entrants, and creating pacts with influential local employers to access their funding sources and to provide political support within the universities concerned. In addition to this, the courses have not been as expensive as appears at first glance partly because of placement arrangements which consume approximately one third of the 'contact' time for three-year degrees and almost half that of diplomas and foundation degrees. Placements release expensive classrooms and simultaneously carry minimal overheads as supervision and 'teaching' are undertaken, gratis or for a peppercorn fee, by practitioners. This is attractive to university managers. If placement agencies commenced charging 'commercial rates' for this work, thereby pushing up unit costs per student, it is doubtful if many existing courses would survive.

Placements have also been helpful in limiting the impact of modularisation upon community and youth work courses. Conditions attached to the professional qualification leave students with rarely more than ten per cent of their timetable available for 'free-standing' modules. Nevertheless modularisation has changed programmes, principally because it has breached disciplinary and professional fortifications. To protect their mainstream provision, most courses have been forced to offer their modules to other students. This necessity has stimulated the growth of allied programmes such as youth and childhood studies that share core modules and link to similar free-standing options. Simultaneously, it has encouraged the construction of large interconnected programmes overlapping a plethora of professional and subject degrees. So for example professional programmes including such as youth and community, social work, criminal justice, nursing and play work coalesce around common modules with sociology, criminology, health studies and psychology, creating opportunities for teaching in large groups shared subjects such as 'research methods' and 'human growth and behaviour'. Inevitably this means modules must be self-contained rather than integrated with other components of the programme. The coherence of any given professional route is therefore disrupted. At the same time, the characteristic small group and tutorial work that was once central to the pedagogical practices of community and youth work education is undermined (Newman and Robertson, 2006; Keeble, 1965).

Such losses are no small matter in a profession whose purpose is to foster critical dialogue in the practice field. They may be unfortunate in relation to say nursing or policing, encouraging a bureaucratised approach that de-humanises both practitioner and 'client', but for youth and community work, reliant on the use of self, upon the capacity of individual practitioners to communicate ideas, to enthuse and teach via word and example, they are disastrous. Conversational skill and proficiency with language are de rigueur for youth and community workers. How they learn their craft is not inconsequential.



To enter into this arena of professional practice should be to set out on an uncharted and un-concluded intellectual adventure wherein the practitioner as an educator will strive, as Oakshott explained, to open up 'intimations of excellence,' offering the young person opportunities to ask new questions, 'acquire new interests and pursue them uncorrupted by the need for immediate results,' and 'learn to seek satisfactions' previously never 'imagined or wished for (1972: 24).' Instead, state mandated youth and community work is unfortunately increasingly about socialisation and accreditation rather than education. Discussion, debate, conversation and the fostering of autonomy are being pushed aside by the need to produce measurable outcomes and deliver externally imposed curricula. Inevitably this transformation re-shapes the ways in which workers are prepared for practice. Profound modifications in practice loop back to re-configure the educational experience of the students in terms of course structure and content. Steiner (2003:102) argues that good teaching must always seek 'to awaken doubts in the pupil, to train for dissent.' Methodologically, pre-packaged learning, power point and tool-kits represent a mode of education which trains for conformity and is diametrically at odds with the traditions of informal education in youth work. As informal education, conversation and reflection are supplanted within state youth work so this is reflected in the conditions of HE where a modularised, individualised and isolationist structure comes to the fore, in order to better equip students for the world of work they will encounter. Such complementarity dims critical insight, reinforces the hegemony of employers in both the field and the academy and exacerbates student instrumentalism.

The instrumentalism which besets most students in the current financial climate might ultimately be the most significant factor in reshaping the provision of community and youth work education and training. The 'non-traditional' groups from whom the courses have always recruited are also those who are likely to bear the brunt of costs shifting towards students. This is not helped by the low starting salaries which they can anticipate on graduation. Potential community and youth work students are therefore particularly responsive to fee disparities. Whilst the policy rhetoric of widening participation has seemed to offer an encouraging environment for non-traditional students, in order to sustain or increase numbers, it has also focused course development upon provision of the cheapest possible programmes. In addition to the lure of government subsidy, the sliding emphasis towards offering Foundation Degrees in FE colleges must be understood in this light. This represents a further movement towards employer control and encourages the anti-intellectual managerial culture which emphasises delivery and outcomes in training rather than praxis in education.

The development of foundation degrees within FE is inimical to the security of undergraduate honours degree programmes in the HE sector. It is possible that the closure of long-standing community and youth work undergraduate programmes in the pre-1992 universities is but a foretaste of what might happen elsewhere as recruits choose the cheapest option which will deliver them a qualification as quickly as possible swelling the ranks of semi-professional youth support workers to the detriment of the development of professional youth work. These closures are also symptomatic of the establishment of a lower status profession as the fissure between the old and new universities widens along lines reflecting the unequal division between research and teaching. The split has dire implications for the quality and intellectual development of the community and youth work profession.



## Research versus teaching

A survey of Research Council Awards for 2006-07 (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2007) shows that amongst the top 30 rated UK universities, only Edinburgh now offers an undergraduate community and youth work programme. Three others, Durham, Reading and Birmingham have during the last decade closed undergraduate programmes. At the other end of the scale, amongst the bottom 30 rated universities, 15 offer such programmes. This must be understood in the context of the drive to maximise funding in which the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) has been considered by the old universities as the main indicator of 'quality'. Those who score high RAE ratings reap substantial financial rewards. Indeed, as Roberts (2003:4) highlights in his review of the process, the foremost purpose of the exercise is 'to inform the selective allocation of funds.'

Within the research-led universities vocational education has been considered unduly expensive in terms of teaching, and has been accorded low status within a peer review system which rates 'theoretical' and discipline based knowledge above practice generated and related knowledge. Journals produced with reference to the application of knowledge, and which span an academic and professional readership, have been marginalised as 'irrelevant' to the RAE, whilst obscure 'peer-reviewed' publications with 'international' editorial boards have been afforded high status. In an environment where the numbers of citations and references for each published article are important indicators of 'standing' (which substitutes for 'quality'), a small and specialist subject area such as youth and community work will always find it difficult to compete and must make its way under the wing of other subjects such as social work, health, education, social policy and history. Academic staff in youth and community work who attempt to publish in the journals of allied disciplines are frequently wrong-footed at the outset because their subject is not 'mainstream.' If they are published, then there is little chance their work will be read by those in the field to whom the work is most relevant. Consequently, community and youth work has struggled in the old university sector with specialist staff finding it difficult to respond to the expectations associated with the RAE and research councils which fund high status research at the same time as maintaining a practice orientation. 'Research active' community and youth work academics are increasingly diverted from the professional and teaching base of their subjects and ultimately from the discipline altogether. As vocational programmes have been deemed 'non-viable' in this arena so staff are being redeployed to other disciplines.

Within the new universities, the RAE has had a negative effect in different ways. Here the intensity of the competition in an unequal market, and the cumulative qualities of successive RAEs wherein success begets success, have created a situation where research has begun to seem a luxury that can no longer be afforded. Cost-benefit analysis has convinced the management of many of the post-1992 universities they stand to gain more by maximising teaching income and exploiting opportunities offered by the targeted funding which accompanies government policy initiatives than by pursuing the uncertainties of research income. In some cases they have abandoned efforts to compete for RAE funds in all but a few specialist areas. Consequently, the drive to increase student numbers has intensified, maximising income at the expense of teaching staff and students. Academic staff are left with less time or energy to undertake research even if they have the inclination. As one research project reveals:

*there is no question that the pressure to meet RAE criteria was an additional source of stress, even for those (probably the majority) who valued research and wanted to engage in it ... research and writing generally had to be done in 'overtime' or rather in 'personal time.'* (Sikes, 2006: 564-565)

Youth and community work teaching and learning, concentrated in new universities, has therefore been systematically denuded of opportunities for related research development. This echoes and reinforces a destructive tension between the vocational and academic in the profession.

The overall consequence of the RAE is increased instrumentalism in both research and practice. The general effect has been a loss of scholarship and of a culture of learning in HE in which debate, critical understanding and analysis might be pursued as much as information and 'evidence'. Research must increasingly conform to the priorities of government if it is to be funded by the research councils. Recently the seven research councils revised the assessment of research proposals to favour those promising the greatest economic impact (Corbyn, 2007). Research which follows knowledge for its own sake or with the intention of developing critical analysis of dominant political principles is unlikely to receive support. Successful applicants are diverted from teaching only to follow research which is subject to the whims and fancies of the dominant political elite (Issitt and Spence, 2005). Meanwhile the increasing collaboration between new universities and local employers and policy makers has led to increased opportunities for academic staff in these institutions to take on 'evaluations'. Although often under-funded these do provide opportunities for the employment of part time or sessional staff to cover teaching whilst full time workers undertake such work as a substitute for the research opportunities they are denied. If such evaluations are pursued as exercises in critical questioning it is unlikely that those involved will be given further opportunities to 'bite the hand that feeds them'. Thus research in both the old and new universities is pursued predominantly as an exercise in evidence gathering and income generation. As Barrow explains:

*It is 'research' rather than 'scholarship' that the institution as a whole prefers to emphasise, and this verbal choice is significant. 'Scholarship' is a general term implying breadth and depth of knowledge, erudition, and perhaps even a whiff of culture; it suggests understanding and appreciation; it may be in the province of the philosopher as readily as that of the scientist. 'Research', by contrast, implies the generation of new knowledge and the search for definite answers to particular problems; it thus lends itself far more readily to the work of the applied scientist than that of the historian or musician; more generally it suggests empirical than speculative or philosophical work. And the implications of this terminology have clearly been instantiated in the practice of higher education. (2003: 10)*

Without the profound and prolonged questioning implied by scholarship independent of funding considerations and which in the case of youth and community work would inevitably engage theory and practice in sustained dialogue between academics and professional workers, as much as (if not more than) with the policy makers who currently dominate the scene, something is lost. Indeed the absence of scholarship threatens the intellectual future of the professional education of youth and community workers. For

if those in the universities, the natural home of scholarship, cease to prioritise it, then it becomes difficult to justify the presence of such education there. If the university is not 'imbuing students with a love of truth, reason and learning' (ibid: 15), not bringing students into intimate contact with scholars then it really is rather pointless to 'deliver' the training in that place. It might as well be done more cheaply by email and booklet or in the local FE college.

## Problems for ETS

A fully developed process of education and training for youth and community work clearly needs to pursue scholarship as well as skills and knowledge in order to create a workforce of the quality traditionally associated with professionalism, and the standard deserved by those at the receiving end of practice. If this cannot be assured by the universities, it could hardly be expected that the endorsing agencies, could do so. In fairness it should be acknowledged CETYCW and the ETS alike have always lacked the funding, and therefore staffing, to adequately undertake even the tasks proposed by Thompson and the government with regards to professional education. Administratively they have been perpetually running to catch up, not least because the re-organisation of higher and further education has led to an escalation of the number of programmes. This rate of expansion would have taxed the resources of an organisation far more generously endowed than either of these have been. That aside it is doubtful if the structures put in place have substantively addressed the issues raised initially by Thompson.

Assessment and endorsement takes place but the quality of the process is variable and somewhat perfunctory. Institutional resources are not scrutinised and far too much must be taken on trust. For example libraries are not checked to ensure that texts cited in documentation are stocked, the quality of placements can not be evaluated nor the qualifications and suitability of fieldwork teachers or tutors on distance learning programmes scrutinised. Guidelines and criteria might have expanded but they often have little purchase on what is actually offered. Prospective and existing programmes tick the boxes and tweak their programme documentation to match the criteria but nothing is done to audit these claims. Once 'approved' surveillance and review is tokenistic.

To do the job it has been given, ETS would need more staff, which means that courses must pay far more for the endorsement process. This is not something they will willingly do, especially as more funding would allow for a more rigorous validation and the creation of an intrusive monitoring system. To maintain standards, it would also be necessary for ETS to be involved, charging a full validation fee, every time an HE institution franchises out a course to another agency or college. Universities cannot be trusted to franchise out programmes without close monitoring because the potential earnings are such it is not in the interests of either the franchiser or the franchisee to ask too many awkward questions. The number of scandals in recent years linked to the franchising process at home and overseas, should be sufficient to alert those responsible for monitoring programmes of the need for vigilance. For example, the library facilities at FE colleges, where many foundation degrees are being offered, are frequently wholly inadequate to sustain under-graduate programmes as even the briefest examination of the journals available to students shows.



Equally the contact hours of FE staff frequently make it impossible for them to undertake the levels of preparation and self-education needed to teach at degree level or monitor placements. Meanwhile, the management structures within FE focus on the need for staff compliance with managerial norms rather than facilitating the creative autonomy that is an essential component for the development of the attributes required of staff teaching at degree level (Hodgson and Jeffs, 2007). Universities might have been seriously corrupted by commercialism, but they still remain different places from FE colleges. Some universities, or more accurately their employees, have managed to retain some allegiance to at least the principle of being more than what Newman called 'educating machines', maintaining a dedication to teaching 'universal knowledge' (1903:11) and developing 'the culture of the intellect' (ibid: xvii). This is almost totally absent in the FE sector which consciously operates according to another set of values and different ends, in particular to 'provide a crucial support for business' (Whittaker 2003: 14; LSDA 2003). ETS has a singular duty to protect some of the poorest and most vulnerable students, who may opt for the FE alternative because it is cheap and handy and all they can manage, against the real dangers of exploitation built into the franchising structure. Initially this must entail ETS in developing processes for 'drilling down' to the point of course delivery.

Because of insufficient capacity, endorsement has become mainly a bureaucratic paper exercise based on the supply of information. No structure exists to enforce inspection, so for example, programmes can, and do, cut resources and transfer teaching to part-time and hourly-paid staff without any fear of sanctions. The prime check is the report submitted annually on each programme by the external examiner(s). Such documents can be of dubious worth. Examiners are selected by the courses themselves, and weak and academically undernourished programmes find it difficult to resist selecting 'sympathetic' individuals to fulfil the role. Even courses with little to fear may be lured into recruiting on the basis of making their own lives more comfortable. Moreover, institutions are learning that by restricting the volume of work shown to the external examiner, reducing the time examiners spend on site and providing standardised report forms with little space for criticism, they can curtail much possible disparagement. Neither CETYCW nor subsequently ETS has infringed on this close relationship or challenged the quality and veracity of the examiner reports submitted. Until the credentials of externals are scrutinised and, when appropriate, appointments questioned or approval withdrawn, this will remain a largely unsatisfactory means of ensuring academic standards are sustained at a time when the pressure from institutions is to cut corners and let the 'customers' through.

For the system of endorsement to be meaningful, courses need to be vigorously held to account to ascertain adequate quality of teaching and quantity of resources to enable what is promised to be delivered. This means the academic standing of those employed to teach on programmes should be monitored not just with reference to the possession of a JNC recognised qualification, but also with regard to the academic qualifications relevant to teaching at under-graduate and, if required, at post-graduate levels. Engagement in appropriate research should be relevant to such monitoring. The CVs which are currently attached to submission documents are insufficient in a context where institutions increasingly buy-in cheaper part-timers to cover teaching so they may redirect their full time staff to other activities.



Students can be, and are bribed by high marks and the prospect of painlessly securing a ticket to practice in an outcome-led world. They therefore cannot be relied upon to insist on 'quality' programmes even if they had the means to assess them. This is usually their first and only experience of higher education, and they possess no comparators regarding what is, and is not, of an adequate standard. They may be vaguely aware the essay returned yesterday with a first-class mark would not pass muster at Cambridge, or the member of staff called professor would not even make the short-list for a temporary lecturer's post at Oxford but so what? Why should they worry about such matters? Why make a fuss when it would diminish their chances of passing? To expect them to act in such a way would be absurd, irrational. Within the context of a higher education system dominated by the cash nexus, ETS must operate on the basis that although they may talk the language of quality, students, universities and employers actually have no incentive to raise professional standards if it costs money or reduces the product 'flow'.

In the current environment courses attempting to apply higher academic standards, demanding more intensive study and enforcing rigorous criteria concerning fitness to practice are the least likely to flourish because they will be more costly. Moreover, they would find it more difficult to recruit because prospective students as rational consumers would avoid them in favour of programmes that promise an easier route to the same professional standing. As 'customers', most would deem it foolish to pay more for a qualification than necessary. A marketised higher education system can only support a limited number of expensive institutions and these will inevitably, like pricey hotels, predominately cater for wealthy clients. To overcome the constant threat of standards being forced down, alternative counter-balancing mechanisms, with adequate finance, and independence are necessary to 'reinforce intellectual standards' as without them 'commercial temptations are bound to take a toll' (Bok, 2003: 198). Once the business model has been allowed to drive out the public service ethic it will take years to overcome the damage done to educational standards by the 'axe of the spoiler and self-interest'.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, ETS lacks the necessary components. Its effectiveness is inhibited not only by resources but also composition. Its *Terms of Reference* (NYA, 2003) mean that it must not have more than 24 voting members. These include two nominated by Training Agencies Group but the majority represent the field and particularly employers<sup>9</sup>. Winch and Hyland (2007) in their authoritative review of related research argue that the predominance of employers in the structures of monitoring training has cultivated a low skill economy by eroding the autonomy of front-line workers and generating a perceived need for a growing army of middle managers. Such control has also devalued theory and focused almost exclusively upon skills, thereby curtailing the capacity of workers to build theory in practice and establish professional sovereignty. That accurately describes the prevailing state of affairs regarding youth and community professional training with its growing emphasis on Competence Based Education and Training (CBET), 'firmly rooted in the functions of employment ...without imposing an educational model of how people learn or behave' (Jessup 1991: 39). European experience suggests that employer hegemony will only be challenged if trade union members and independent academics, unaligned to any of the universities providing courses, are included in sufficient numbers to challenge the opportunity for employers and training agencies to develop the cosy relationships that help sustain the low skill, low cost equilibrium that benefits them all, at least in the short-term

(see Winch and Hyland 2007: 30-44).

The expectation that CETYCW and subsequently ETS would regulate standards of entry is now a dead letter. The number of courses has grown and so too has the pressure to fill every available place. In the race for students, criteria for entry have been downgraded. In particular, requirements that entrants should have substantive practice experience and be over a certain age have been largely set aside. No hard evidence exists that older 'mature' students make better practitioners or students, but even if they did, it would be impossible to return to the position prevailing two decades ago when such students formed a majority on all programmes. Overall, the proportion of 'mature' applicants has declined and will continue to do so as the costs of 'returning to study' inexorably mount. Meanwhile the numbers of teenagers entering higher education continues to rise. The long term implication of this is that the pool of experienced candidates is steadily drained. Social workers, teachers and medics can now all commence professional training at 18 without prior experience and in such circumstances it is difficult to argue that community and youth work should be an exception. ETS could, and probably should, impose minimum requirements for entry such as an acceptable level of literacy or a specified period of approved prior practice. If it did so, some courses would probably close, which might not be a bad thing but, as things stand, it is difficult to envisage how such criteria might be enforced.

It has been impossible for CETYCW and the ETS to address the remaining concern of the Thompson Report that existing courses were focusing unduly on the need to carry students through programmes rather than prioritising their preparation for the morally and intellectually challenging work they would encounter after graduation. Through no fault of the endorsement process, but rather as a consequence of conditions in educational institutions, the situation has probably deteriorated during the intervening years. Fear of litigation from failing students and trepidation that students may hold staff responsible for their own inadequacies, have made a bad situation worse. Increasingly students are treated as child-like creatures in need of protection from the everyday troubles of life by counselling and professional support (Furedi, 2004). The world of higher education, like other welfare and educational agencies, has embraced a therapeutic ethos that 'legitimises beliefs about the diminished self rather than the empowered, autonomous and resilient self' (Ecclestone, 2007:466). Universities advise staff to pre-prepare students for lectures they may find uncomfortable, some even going so far as to create committees that vet the 'controversial' (Baty, 2004). Placements and educational visits are wrapped around by risk assessments, despite a reality that the risks are minuscule, indeed far less than would be encountered on a Friday night out (Adams, 2007). Colleges tell staff not to ask students challenging questions as this may risk damaging their self esteem (Ecclestone, 2007: 456). One youth and community lecturer found himself being warned as to his future conduct by his head of department after students complained he was 'overworking' them, by insisting they read the 'two articles or chapters per week' that he provided. This came on top of a previous complaint that he was being unreasonable and discriminatory by expecting them to read a set text (personal communication). In another instance staff were told not to use handwriting when marking essays as this might be difficult for students to read (presumably no young person or colleague will ever write them a note?) One course tells staff they must start their commentary on an essay with a positive comment, and always balance a

critical one with a supportive one. Another was told to cease using a 'red pen' and writing comments on student essays as some had found the negative feedback upsetting (personal communications). These and countless other examples of 'best practice' reflect a:

*style of affirmation favoured by parenting experts for infants ... Inevitably, the more energy that academics devote to attending to the emotional needs of their undergraduates, the less seriously they take them as potential intellectuals* (Furedi, 2004: 144/5).

The cossetting of students tends to be greatest on courses such as youth and community work and social work where much of the teaching is undertaken by 'caring' professionals who bring their external modes of practice into the academic environment. The techniques used whilst working with 'troubled' and 'troublesome' young people are deployed in the class and tutorial. Such staff teach by example without reference to the fact that students have voluntarily opted to enter the adult world of the university and that the primary role of lecturers is to address their intellectual, not their emotional needs, to stimulate curiosity and autonomy not to foster the dependency which situates students as clients. The caring approach adopted by academic staff has possibly contributed to the epidemic of stress and absenteeism plaguing youth and community work. By treating students as delicate and immature, unready for the rigours of the world, they both enable those unsuited to practice to qualify, and fail to bring to maturity those who would rise to the challenge and enter practice as confident and enthusiastic professionals.

## Where now?

Measured against the functions which Thompson and the government hoped CETYCW and subsequently ETS would perform, it is difficult to say their work has been a 'success.' However in the present circumstances, ETS is worth defending, partly because its existence is an acknowledgement of a discrete body of knowledge associated with the professional practice of youth and community work, but also because the maintenance of the system of endorsement is linked with the terms and conditions of professional employment under JNC. Moreover, in practical terms, a body able to collect data on staff and monitor changes in professional training performs an unglamorous but essential task in centrally registering courses and counting graduates.

Theoretically, as youth and community work evolves into an all-graduate profession, it should be anticipated that the ETS would gain more resources and the authority to weed out poor courses, to act as a counterpoint to the pressures exerted by the universities and employers to constantly reduce costs and deliver the cheapest possible training. However, the wider policy climate does not look promising for the maintenance of such a body and indeed, raises the whole question of the meaning of an 'all graduate' profession. In this climate, driven by various policy developments including *Every Child Matters* (2003) and the 2004 Children Act, *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005), and the 2006 Education Act, it is apparent that not only is youth work being forced ever further away from community work, but that it is also being deconstructed and reshaped as a series of 'specialisms' designed to support other services.



Within the 'integrated workforce' organised under local Children's Trusts, the skills and methods of youth and community workers are required primarily to support work with young people within the terms of reference of health, social work, juvenile justice, and education systems (Jeffs and Smith, 2007). A distinctive knowledge base, let alone any effort to develop a body of associated scholarship is unnecessary for youth work within this landscape. What is more important is that youth workers develop competence in working with specific 'youth' issues within the field of their employment and especially with 'difficult,' or 'excluded' young people. Having already been dislocated from community work, 'professional' youth work is being re-configured as a sub-section of children's services. The implications of this for the training programmes are profound. On the one hand, it is possible that those interested in youth work will find it of more value in terms of their own career prospects to pursue that interest as a specialism of another professional area such as health or teaching. On the other hand, in order to retain their relevance to the practice environment, courses are likely to change their orientation, seeking collaboration and partnership with programmes offering social work, health, teaching or criminology or becoming specialist routes through broader 'children's work' qualifications. The development of new courses serving the integrated children's workforce is inevitable and will be an attractive option for those universities seeking to extend their vocational portfolio. Indeed it is probable that those who have no previous history of offering youth and community work training will be at an advantage in this matter, carrying no 'baggage' about youth and community work. A body such as the ETS is entirely inappropriate for monitoring standards in this context. It might be developed to incorporate specialist sub-sections, but it is more likely to be abandoned in favour of a wider agency for monitoring all courses contributing to the integrated children's workforce. As a marginal profession serving other institutions, the maintenance of youth work theory and scholarship will hardly be a priority for such a body. And if the ETS is abandoned, then JNC terms and conditions of service, already lacking purchase in the voluntary sector, will become more or less meaningless within statutory services.

Questions relating to the meaning of an all-graduate profession linked to 'graduate' rates of pay can only be understood with reference to developments in the sub-graduate arena. Here the influence of *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005) and *Aiming High: A ten year strategy for young people* (2007) become relevant in relation to the widespread development of foundation degrees leading initially to the qualification of 'youth support worker'. These workers will probably become the 'technicians' deployed to work with young people via the medium of the new activities and clubs financed as part of the 'youth offer'. It is not required for such workers to be honours graduates because the emphasis is upon competence and skill in 'activity,' or 'instruction' rather than informal educational methods, even though informal education will be one medium through which they engage with young people. It appears that as the move to an 'all graduate' profession is instigated, generic youth and community work is paradoxically being repositioned as a sub-graduate, quasi-profession with much training located in the underfunded and employer led FE sector. Those who emerge with sub degree qualifications will be rewarded with lower wages and poorer working conditions than those with the 'professional' honours degrees.

Developments in the statutory sector are only one side of the picture. Voluntary agencies have always been major contributors and as 'third sector partners' are increasingly favoured



as a means of 'delivering' government policy and services. The commissioning process which grew apace following *Transforming Youth Work* (DfES, 2002) has effectively devolved much statutory youth work to this sector which has no historic allegiance to JNC terms and conditions of service, nor to recruiting JNC qualified workers. Indeed it is partly this indifference which enables it to deliver the required policy outcomes at lower cost than local authorities. Outside the need to deliver to policy tied to government funding, this sector has a degree of freedom to pursue its own interests which sometimes coincide with those of government but not always. Increasingly, specialist interest groups in the voluntary sector, especially those driven by religious values, are developing forms of education and training rooted in their own belief system and structured primarily to meet the needs of a 'faith based' professional youth and community work practice. Amongst those providing these programmes can be found serious reservations as to the value of training that focuses on technique and practice outcomes rather than theology and ministry (Campbell, 2006: Stow and Fearon, 1987). One might question the quality of the theology, or the values under-pinning much faith-based practice, but at least within that setting serious debate rages regarding what workers need to know in order to be effective informal educators alongside concerns about the intellectual quality and vocational commitment of workers recruited for their 'skills'. It is within this context that the growing trend towards the development of courses with specific religious components must be understood. Courses supported by religious organisations disproportionately recruit highly motivated and high achieving young people. If this development continues the role of the ETS in ensuring the maintenance of the 'professional' education element within them may become problematic because the seduction of evangelism drives a tendency towards self-referencing in such environments. The rationale for such courses seeking the approval of ETS is at times difficult to comprehend partly as complying with the conditions set by ETS erodes the time free to be devoted to theological exploration, but also because JNC recognition has never been a requirement for those seeking employment within the lion's share of this sector.

## Conclusion

Youth work is educational. That does not mean being the handmaiden of formal education, rounding up the truants, distracting the disruptive and persuading the disaffected to return to the classroom and take their tests like good boys and girls. Nor is it about 'learning to do this or that' in order to better meet an outcome set by a committee or bureaucrat located far away. Rather it is educational in a deeper sense. For like the good school, the good youth work engages with young people so that:

*learning may be recognised as, itself, a golden satisfaction which needs no adventitious gilding to recommend it; .... that bestows ... the gift of childhood recollected, not as a passage of time hurried through on the way to more profitable engagements, but with gratitude, as an enjoyed initiation into the mysteries of the human condition: the gift of self knowledge and of satisfying intellectual and moral identity. (Oakeshott, 1972: 26)*

Training of itself will never be even part way sufficient to equip youth workers to undertake this role. The historic struggle to locate youth and community work education in the university sector, and fashion a graduate profession has surely not been motivated merely

by snobbery and a hankering after mythic professional status? Rather it was predicated upon a belief that youth workers would be superior educators if their own education was the best that could reasonably be secured, if it was located within institutions dedicated to educating 'the intellect to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it' (Newman, 1858: 126).

As long as youth and community work degrees are crammed full of sessions and practice designed to teach the supposedly essential 'bespoke' skills, as they are described in recent government publications, too little space is left for them to embrace theory. Students need, and deserve, courses that prioritise theory.

*There is no shortage of people who disparage educational theory and maintain that decisions are best left to experienced practitioners. But the implied distinction is absurd. ... The business of selecting one procedure rather than another and of assessing one practice as preferable to another is theoretical, so the idea of practice divorced from theory is unintelligible, unless we were seriously to advocate unreflective action. (Barrow, 1990: 99)*

The gradual displacement of theory by skills is removing from practitioners the ability to make their own theory, to engage in critical investigative conversations and construct alternatives to the status quo. As Barrow argues, familiarity with theory makes professional choices possible and under-pins the capacity for reflective practice.

The expulsion of theory from so much training is not the only challenge. Post-graduates theoretically carry with them knowledge accumulated whilst reading for a first degree. Christians, Muslims and others motivated, even programmed, to teach a particular faith, have a well of learning to draw upon (Doyle, 1999). Increasingly apolitical and post-feminist youth workers raised on the thin gruel of the national curriculum have little of comparable substance to offer. This is reflected in the rise of curriculum based work (Ord 2007) and packaged units of accreditation material whose content is assembled by others, often from the perspective of managers of other welfare agencies, for workers to 'deliver'. The higher education currently offered youth and community workers is largely devoid of the cultural breadth and intellectual content that would enhance the students' capacity to offer those they eventually work with a worthwhile educational engagement. It allows no legroom to enable students to acquire the education and wisdom that ensures they have something worthwhile to give young people and communities. The ransom extracted for training is their birthright to a rounded liberal education. Yet what they crucially need to be worthwhile practitioners is precisely that sort of education.

Given the present formulation, it is tempting to say it matters not where youth and community work training is located but that is a council of despair. Rather than accept this situation and acquiesce to further drift towards atheoretical and culturally sterile programmes, it would be better to seek to reverse the trends of the last two decades by insisting upon something better, demanding for youth and community workers the sort of university education Searle argues for:

*First the student should have enough knowledge of his or her cultural tradition to know*

*how it got to be the way it is ... However, you do not understand your own tradition if you do not see it in relation to others. Works from other cultural traditions need to be studied as well ... Second, you need to know enough of the natural sciences so that you are not a stranger in the world ... Third, you need to have some knowledge of the subject matter that used to be called political economy. Fourth, you need to know at least one foreign language well enough so that you can read the best literature that that language has produced in the original, and so you can carry on a reasonable conversation and have dreams in that language... Fifth, you need to know enough philosophy so that the methods of logical analysis are available to you to be used as a tool... Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you need to acquire the skills of writing and speaking that make for candour, rigour, and clarity (1990: 41-42).*

Quarrel over the detail by all means, but does this not promise so much more than adding to the skills lists, the tick boxes and finalising the benchmarks? Is this not far more likely to produce imaginative, innovative and effective informal educators as well as better youth workers than tinkering with the ETS list of competencies and ticking LLUK's boxes?

Opportunities for reform may be nearer than we may dare to hope. It is unlikely the existing structure will hold for much longer. Form tends to follow function with regards to professional education. JNC grew directly out of Albemarle and ETS out of Thompson, each to accommodate new structures. Neither now equates well to contemporary circumstance. CETCYW and ETS were based on assumptions regarding the structure of HE and the youth services that are now only partially valid. If, (and it is a big if given the propensity of the present government to dismantle the structures it creates), Children's Trusts should survive for more than a few more years then it seems inevitable that a new qualifications profile will emerge reflecting their workforce needs. Free-standing local authority youth services are already disappearing, consumed by Children's Trusts or re-constituted as attachments to them. As statutory youth work becomes a component, or appendage, of the Trusts so youth and community work training is ever more likely to become a route or specialism within a wider qualification. Confusion over who takes precedence – LLUK, Children's Workforce Development Council or a combination of professional boards such as ETS and the General Social Care Council will ultimately be resolved. The existing qualifications structure has been described as 'confusing' (Rogers, 2006), as 'a mess' and 'not up to scratch' by Estelle Morris Chair of Children's Workforce Development Council (Bennett, 2007). Change and wholesale reforms are clearly inevitable and probably to the detriment of the more fragile bodies such as ETS who will either be absorbed or cut adrift. Activity staff and the managers of 'hubs' and extended school provision may be classified as youth workers, but many will be recruited from the more numerous graduates emerging from Sport, Leisure and Arts Management programmes who have relevant skills but not necessarily the values of youth work.

Giddens argues that:

*Everyone in the academic world works within traditions. Even academic disciplines as a whole, like economics, sociology or philosophy have traditions. The reason is that no one could work in a wholly eclectic fashion. Without intellectual traditions, ideas have no focus or tradition. (1999: 45)*



Youth and community work education has once before been driven out of the university sector and remains far too marginal and recent, like social work (Henkel, 1994), to have constructed a tradition substantial enough to protect it against expulsion or incorporation a second time. Probation and adult education have in less than a decade been expelled from the academy, so there is no room for complacency. Youth and community work will most certainly retain a presence as a 'route' or 'specialism' within some generic Children and Young People programmes. Elsewhere it will be manoeuvred out by a combination of market forces and managerialism. FE colleges and distance learning providers are eagerly waiting in the wings to mop up the market in the training of Youth Support Workers. Independent faith-based courses, comprising an eclectic mix of Youth Ministry, social action, community development and youth work will continue to expand. Eventually they might realise they neither want, nor need, an ETS to tell them what to teach or do.

The best hope is that a rump of sufficient size will survive around which it will be possible to create and sustain an alternative educational tradition built around informal education and social pedagogy. If this happens it will be the best possible outcome holding out a promise of a more radical creative model of practice that can be linked closely to humanistic liberal arts programmes. Newman who is always helpful at these moments once wrote that 'the cause of truth, never dominant in this world, has its ebbs and flows. It is pleasant to live in a day when the tide is coming in' (1872:251). For informal education and youth work, rather than services for the management and controlling of youth, the tide has been going out for some time. This should not unduly depress; rather it ought to prompt us into seeking alternatives to the drab and Philistine present.

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## Notes

- 1 The JNC, or to give it its full title the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth Leaders and Community Centre Wardens was created by the government in 1961 and comprises a balanced membership of employers and staff. It is required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State regarding the suitability of qualifications for recognition for qualified status and is responsible for negotiating salary scales and conditions of service for statutory youth workers. The terms and conditions it agrees serve as a template for those prevailing in many voluntary organisations.
- 2 Created by the Health Visiting and Social Work Training Act 1962 it was tasked with securing suitable facilities for training, approving courses and attracting trainees and unlike CETYCW, which followed, was empowered to provide further courses of training and undertake research. CETSW has now been replaced by the employer dominated General Social Care Council.
- 3 Both the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Education and Training Committee are appointed by the Executive Board of the National Youth Agency. Both are chosen from amongst the existing members of that Boardmembership of the Executive Board. In addition to the Chair and Vice-Chair there are 20 members of whom three are from Higher Education institutions delivering qualifying programmes and one is from CYWU (Community and Youth Workers Union). It meets three times a year.
- 4 Some of the 'old universities' organised themselves separately as The Russell Group which is named after the London hotel where their vice-chancellors first met to plan how best to preserve and protect their interests after the polytechnics were granted university status.
- 5 One of the authors interviewed, as part of a research project, a number of individuals who were obliged to take the Connexions Diploma as a condition of employment. One of these reported she had asked five times for a card to use the library of the university that was 'franchised' to deliver the programme. Each time she was told she did not need to read anything not in the pack to pass the course so acquiring a card was pointless. Finally the course leader lost his patience with the student and told them no other trainee had asked for a card and that the university would not issue her with one. Another, who happened to be a linguistics graduate, was asked by the lecturer not to ask questions as this caused problems regarding 'covering the material'. He persisted in asking questions until roundly attacked by a number of the other trainees who said this wasted their time.
- 6 Plagiarism is a major problem within many universities, research indicating that as many as a quarter of students admit to cheating in this way (Lightfoot, 2004). However some programmes make it far easier to do so and the standardised assignments of the Connexions Diploma for example allowed, according to ex-students of the authors, students to donate assignments to those who followed them onto the programme.

One mentioned a box in the corner of the office where copies of marked essays were deposited for colleagues to 'borrow'.

- 7 'Bench-marking' of academic subjects is an exercise whereby committees are required to establish for each academic discipline exactly what a graduate in that subject should know and be taught..
- 8 Quoted from John Clare – *Remembrances*.
- 9 The overall membership is:
  - 2 members of the Executive Board of the NYA who act as Chair and Vice-Chair
  - 1 from the Community and Youth Workers Union
  - 1 from the trade union Unison
  - 1 from the Federation of Community Work Training Groups
  - 1 from the JNC Employers' side
  - 1 from the JNC Staff side
  - 1 from the National Association of Youth and Community Education Officers
  - 2 from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services
  - 1 from the Regional Youth Work Advisers group
  - 1 from the Association of principal Youth and Community Officers
  - 2 from the Training Agencies Group
  - 1 from the Awarding Bodies Forum
  - 1 from the Sector Skills Council (LLUK)Plus 5 members from the wider field who are judged by the committee to have a contribution to make to the work of the committee and 3 Co-optees to be determined by the Committee.